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PASTORAL ADDRESSES.

For the Lent of 1851.

ARMAND FRANCIS MARY DE CHARBONNEL,

By the Grace of God, and the favor of the Holy Apostolic See, Bishop of Toronto :
To the Clergy and Laity of the Diocese :—

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN :

Do Penance, was the first preaching of our Lord after having fasted forty days in the Desert. Such will be our first instruction to you in recalling to your minds, at the beginning of this holy season, 1st. What is Lent ? 2nd. For what reason Lent was instituted ; 3rd. With what disposition Lent is to be spent.

1st. Lent is a solemn fast of forty days, which, according to the most ancient doctors, as well as the Lord's Day on Sunday, was instituted by the Apostles, and always observed throughout the Church of Christ. "There is no place," says St. Basil, preaching on Fast, "no city, no corner in the world, wherein this law is unknown : soldiers, travellers, merchants, hear it published everywhere, and submit themselves to it with an humble docility ; therefore let nobody believe himself exempt from it. Every Christian, of whatever country and rank he may be, is included in the precept ; angels record the names of those who keep it exactly. Be afraid, that by breaking it, yours be effaced from the roll of the faithful servants."

Of old the greatest penances were scarcely sufficient for the primitive Christian. In this Diocese, through a dispensation of the Holy Apostolic See, Lent consists in taking every day, Sundays excepted, a single full meal, which must be without flesh meats, on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, as well as on the first Thursday of Lent and all the Holy Week. Besides it is allowed to take a mouthful in the morning and a small collation in the evening.

To transgress this law, without a sufficient reason, is a venial or mortal sin, according to the degree of the violation.

Are exempt from fasting : Youths under twenty-one years, and from both fasting and abstaining, children under seven years ; sick or weak persons ; women with child or giving suck ; those who are obliged to hard labors, in a word, all those who, through whatever impediment, cannot either fast or abstain without a great inconvenience.

But remark well, dearly beloved brethren, that a discreet fast is rather wholesome. Such has always been the opinion of eminent physicians,—we obey them for our health, would we not obey the Church for the health of our souls ? Notwithstanding the most austere fasts St. Paul, the first hermit, lived 113 years ; St. Antony, 105 ; St. Arsenius, and St. Romualdus, 120 ; St. John, the silentiary, 104 ; the abbot Theodosius, 105 ; the two Sts. Matharius, St. Paphnucius, St. Sabas, St. John of Egypt, about 100. Have you ever read of a certain Cornaro, an Italian, that being exhausted by debauchery at 35 years of age, and being given up by the doctors, recovered and enjoyed so perfect a health by the only means of a severe diet, living on twelve ounces a day, that he died upwards of 100 years old.

When your motive for not fasting or not abstaining is not evidently sufficient, you must take advice with a prudent person, such as your Confessor or Pastor. A person may be excused for a day, a week, and not for another week or day. Again one may be excused from fasting and not from abstaining, or from abstaining and not from fasting. But what you must know well about that law so much abused amongst those who are not acquainted with our Divine Religion, is, that when a person transgresses it, what defiles the soul is not the food, but the disobedience of the will. As it was disobedience and not the food which defiled the first Christians, when they ate blood or strangled meats, forbidden to them by the Apostles in the first council of Jerusalem ; as it was disobedience and not the food which defiled the Jews when they ate swine's flesh or any other food forbidden to them by Moses, in the name of God ; As it was disobedience and not the food which defiled men, when they ate flesh with blood forbidden to Noah by God himself, after the flood ; as it was disobedience and not the food which defiled Adam, Eve, and their posterity when they ate the fruit forbidden to them by their Creator under pain of temporal and eternal death. Whence you see, Dearly Beloved Brethren, that the law of abstinence is as old as the world, and the first law which God gave to Man ; hence we see days of abstinence and fast, kept not only by the Jews and Catholics, but even amongst Christians separated from us, amongst the Musselmans and Pagans. The Common Prayer Book of England contains a list of days of fast and abstinence. Amongst the Greeks, those who do not keep Lent are not looked upon as Christians. Seventy different sects of Mahomedans keep a fast of one month, and many tribes of Indians have been found keeping some fasts.

St. Paul, it is true, condemns in his Epistles the distinction of meats ; but it was only against those who falsely forbade some meats, and marriage itself, as things coming from an evil principle, and against those who durst not eat of meat sold in the market, lest it might have been offered to idols, just as we should condemn, now, ignorant Catholics who would distinguish between beings created by God and others created by Satan ; between articles sold in the market by Indians, for instance, and others sold by Catholics ; but far from condemning the fasts of the Church in the texts referred to, St. Paul himself fasted and chastised his body very severely, lest, perhaps, he might become a reprobate, recommending nothing more than the mortification of the flesh, and obedience to the laws of the Church, always as wise as the Holy Ghost, her divine assistant.

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For 2nd, Dearly Beloved Brethren, why has Lent been instituted ?

1st. That thereby we might do the penance, so strictly commanded by our Lord, as to hear Mass every Sunday, and communicate at least once a year, were prescribed by the rules of the Church, to direct us in the positive commandments of our Lord, about praying, sanctifying his day, and eating his life-giving flesh. Oh ! Dearly Beloved Brethren, how consoling are those precepts of our Mother ; we know very well that there is no salvation without penance. " Unless you do penance you shall all perish likewise," says Jesus Christ. But how and in what measure, are we to do penance to discharge that indispensable duty ? Could we have known that by ourselves ? and should have not such an uncertainty been for us a perpetual source of anxiety in the service of God ? Whilst we are most positively certain that, by keeping well the penitential prescriptions of the ruling Church, we fully fulfill the Lord's Commandments about doing penance ; and so we live in peace, as a child is quiet about his father's orders, when, to fulfill them, he has complied with the directions of his mother.

2nd.—Lent has been instituted, that We might, according to the Prophet's warning turn ourselves to God with all our heart, with fasting, weeping and mourning : that We might imitate not only Moses and Elias who fasted forty days, not only the Rechabites and Nazarites so much commended for their abstinence, not only the Ninivites saved from destruction by a fast of forty days with sack-cloth ; not only Daniel, Judith, Esther and Tobias highly praised and blessed for their fasts ; not only David whose knees were weak through fasting ; not only the Prophetess Ann, who yet fasted at 84 years of age ; not only the greatest of men, John the Baptist, scarcely eating and drinking, and his disciples often fasting ; but that We might imitate Jesus Christ himself, who fasted forty days in the desert ; for if he suffered so much in his innocent flesh for our sins, is it not right that We should fast and suffer a little in our guilty and rebellious flesh, the cause of all his pains and death. Hence did he predict to his Apostles that after his ascension his disciples should fast ; hence did he teach them the way of fasting, not after the Pharisee's fashion, but with humility and meritoriously for heaven ; hence our Catholic Lent, ember days and vigils.

3rd.—Lent has been instituted to be a preparation for the great solemnity of Easter and for receiving the two Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist ; for, says St. Paul, We cannot hope to participate in the grace and the glory of Christ's resurrection, unless we participate in the afflictions and sufferings of his passion. Now, are not the effects of fast to tame the flesh, so often an occasion of sin, to atone for sins and preserve from relapses, to cast out Satan and overcome his assaults, to elevate the mind and give our prayers more efficacy, to increase our union with God and our merits for heaven. " Fast for your sins," says St. Bazile, and fast, not to sin any more ; you know that to their fast were indebted, Sara for her deliverance from Devils ; Moses, Daniel, Elias, for the most intimate communications with God, and two barren women for their sons Samson and Samuel. Tell me now, Dearly Beloved Brethren, are not all those reasons of the institution of Lent calculated to encourage us in observing its penitential prescriptions with generous dispositions.

III.—The first and best is to abstain from sin and avoid its proximate occasion, to fulfill better one's duties, and suffer more patiently with spirit of penance ; another disposition is to accompany fasts with spiritual and corporal works of mercy according to one's means and with more frequent elevations of the soul to God amidst daily occupations and crosses, saying often in the heart : I offer it to thee, O God, for my sins ; have mercy on me, O Lord ; never forgetting these words of the Angel to Tobias, *prayers, alms and fasts are of better worth than treasures.*

These dispositions, Dearly Beloved Brethren, necessary for sanctifying Lent, are particularly so for those who, for some reason, are dispensed with fasting or abstaining ; they ought to endeavour to make up with the interior spirit of penance, what is wanting to the exterior fast. Our forefathers in faith, besides austerities in comparison of which ours are nothing, used to go to confess at the beginning of Lent ; do the same, Dearly Beloved Brethren, and you who frequent the Sacraments receive them oftener with better dispositions during this holy time ; there can be no better fruit of corporal fast and abstinence. Manna, a figure of the holy Eucharist, was the only and daily food of the Israelites in the desert. A holy King used to confess his sins and receive every day of Lent ; as for you who too seldom receive the Sacraments prepare yourselves for receiving them very soon. Were you in mortal sin and remaining in that unfortunate state, your fast would be lost for heaven ; since good works done in mortal sin, though being useful for one's conversion cannot be meritorious for heaven ; because before deserving the reward of the friends of God, we needs must be his friends, and you are aware that being in mortal sin, instead of being the friends of God, we are his enemies, deserving hell. Therefore, Dearly Beloved Brethren, as soon as possible make a sincere confession with hearty contrition, either to increase or to recover the friendship of God, through a Priest's absolution.

Finally, on next Wednesday, in order to begin well this holy career of penance, receive the blessed ashes with a spirit of compunction, remembering what we have deserved for our sins,—remembering that we are dust, and we shall return to dust,—remembering that this our dust shall share in the eternal doom of our soul either unhappy or happy, according to its works of flesh or penance.

The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, be with you all, Amen.

Shall the present Pastoral Address be read at Mass in all the Churches of the Diocese, on the first Sunday after its reception.

Toronto, 25th Feb., 1851.

† ARM'D. F. M.,
Bishop of Toronto.

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